

United Nations warns situation in Libya deeply troubling



United Nations, February 17 (RHC)-- A United Nations official has warned that the situation in Libya is “deeply troubling,” a fragile ceasefire in the crisis-hit country has seen dozens of violations, and a UN arms embargo imposed on the country has become a “joke.”

UN Deputy Special Representative to Libya Stephanie Williams made the comments at a joint press conference with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on the sidelines of the 56th Munich Security Conference (MSC) on Sunday and after a meeting of foreign ministers to follow up on a Berlin summit on Libya last month.

“The situation on the ground remains deeply troubling. The truce is holding only by a thread. It is the Libyan people that continue to suffer the most. The economic situation continues to deteriorate, exacerbated by the oil blockade,” the UN official said, referring to the blockade of oil facilities by rebel forces in Libya. He said more than 150 violations had been reported since the ceasefire was agreed last month.

Since 2014, two rival seats of power have emerged in Libya: the internationally-recognized government of Prime Minister Fayeaz al-Sarraj, and another group based in the eastern city of Tobruk, supported militarily by rebel forces under the command of renegade general Khalifa Haftar.

The rebel leader, who is primarily supported by the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Jordan, launched a deadly offensive to capture the capital, Tripoli, the seat of the GNA, in April last year. Despite intense fighting, Haftar has so far failed to achieve his objective of ousting the GNA, and the offensive has stalled outside the capital.

Last month, officials from Turkey, Russia, Egypt, France, Italy, Britain, and the United States gathered in the German capital of Berlin to help establish a permanent ceasefire in Libya. Sarraj and Haftar were also present in the summit.

The final communiqué of the summit called on all the parties concerned in the conflict “to redouble their efforts for a sustained suspension of hostilities, de-escalation and a permanent ceasefire.” Participants also pledged not to interfere in Libya’s internal affairs and its conflict and agreed to “fully respect” the arms embargo imposed on the North African country by the UN in 2011. However, Haftar refused to sign the joint communiqué.

Elsewhere in her remarks on Sunday, Williams condemned the ongoing breaches of the UN weapons embargo on Libya, saying it “has become a joke, we all really need to step up here.” She added that the embargo had been violated “by land, sea, and air, but it needs to be monitored and there needs to be accountability,” warning that the North African country was now awash with illegally-imported advanced weapons.

The situation in Libya was been compounded as a result of a move by Turkey, a Libyan government ally, to transfer allied militants from Syria to the North African country.

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